Research on Texas in U.S. Higher Education and the Effectiveness of Race-Neutral Admissions Practices

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I. Texas is a major stakeholder in the growth and educational attainment of the nation’s underrepresented minority populations.

- The U.S. has experienced considerable growth of its Hispanic and Black populations, which together constitute the majority of underrepresented students in the nation’s schools: Between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population accounted for more than 50 percent of the total increase in the U.S. population (15.2 million out of 27.3 million). The Black population also grew faster than the total U.S. population (12 percent versus 9 percent) (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011; Rastogi, Johnson, Hoeffel, & Drewery, 2011).

- Texas had the greatest population growth in the nation from 2000 to 2010: During this period, Texas had the greatest numeric population increase of all U.S. states (4 million) making it one of the nation’s major demographic stakeholders. Texas also registered the second largest number of Hispanics (after California) and the third largest number of Blacks (after New York and Florida) (Ennis et al., 2011; Mackun & Wilson, 2011; Rastogi et al., 2011).

- Nationally, the demographics of the population increase in Texas is reflected in the nation’s changing postsecondary education population: By 2010, Hispanics were the largest minority on the nation’s college campuses; by 2011 they constituted the largest minority group at the nation’s four-year colleges and universities (Fry, 2011; Fry & Lopez, 2012). Hispanics are the largest minority in Texas, and in the nation as a whole.

- The Texas high school graduate population indicates a growing percentage of underrepresented minority students and a declining percentage of White students: Hispanic high school graduates experienced an increase of 72 percent from FY 2002 to FY 2011 (from 74,446 to 127,746); the African American population experienced an increase of 29 percent during this same period (from 30,030 to 38,755). Meanwhile, the population of White high school graduates in Texas decreased by 1,000 from 2010 to 2011 (down to 107,597), following the general trend of a decrease in the White college-age population that began in FY 2008 and is expected to continue at least until 2015 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2012).

II. General college participation rates of the largest minority groups in Texas show mixed progress. Differences by gender remain stark.

- Mixed enrollment progress: Progress made to date toward state goals set by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board for college participation rates by race and ethnicity across all postsecondary sectors is as follows:
  - Hispanics: Despite an increase of more than 237,000 Hispanic college enrollees from 2000 to 2011, Texas remains well below the state higher education board’s enrollment goals, which were set with consideration for the fact that Hispanics are expected to become the largest racial/ethnic group in the state by 2015. As of 2011, Hispanic males had the lowest college participation rate of all racial/ethnic and gender groups at 3.8 percent.
  - African Americans: African American enrollment has exceeded target numbers in general enrollment, growing by 100,942 students from 2000 to 2011, a 93 percent increase. However, there are distinct differences in enrollment numbers within this population; as of fall 2011, Black females had the highest participation rate among the major racial/ethnic and gender groups, at 8.7 percent.

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1 Prepared for AERA Media Briefing on Fisher v. University of Texas, Austin Briefing on AERA et al. Amicus Brief On Strength of the Science, September, 27, 2012; Washington, DC.
III. An increase in high school graduation rates for Hispanics and sizable increase in college enrollment rates for African Americans has not translated into expected increases for either group in the Texas selective public institution sector.¹

- **Texas Top Ten Percent Plan (TTTP) and eligible enrollees**: The number of total students who were admitted to Texas colleges and universities in 2010, 12 years after the start of the percent plan, was twice the number admitted in 1998 (13,092 versus 26,600); the number of these students enrolled showed a similar increase (9,957 versus 17,701) (Horn & Flores, in press).

- **Underrepresented students eligible for the TTTP are still less likely to be represented at elite institutions, despite noteworthy increases in their eligibility for admissions under the percent plan**:² A notable increase in the percentage of students admitted under the TTTP plan does not reflect the same level of increase in enrollment for different racial/ethnic groups at elite and non-elite public institutions in Texas. In 2010, 60 percent of White TTTP students enrolled in elite public institutions, compared to 69 percent of Asian American students, 44 percent of Hispanic students, and only 34 percent of African American students. In that same year, 36 percent of African American TTTP students enrolled in the non-selective four-year sector of Texas higher education, compared to 29 percent of Hispanic students, 19 percent of White students, and only 5 percent of Asian American students (Horn & Flores, in press).

- **Enrollment of underrepresented students at The University of Texas at Austin**: African American students constituted only an average 3.7 percent of UT-Austin’s entering class during the period the percent plan was in place without an accompanying policy that allowed the consideration of race in admissions. During the same period, the Latino student presence at the university, which averaged 15 percent from 1998 to 2004, was far below the state’s significant population of Latino high school graduates, which was 31 percent in 1997-1998.

IV. Race-neutral admissions policies do not increase racial and ethnic diversity at elite public colleges and universities.

- **Any rebuilding of the level of racial and ethnic diversity at Texas flagship institutions has been due to demography and not to race-neutral policy changes**: Although minority students have constituted an increasing percentage of the state’s high school graduates, any recovery in the percentage of underrepresented minority students attending selective public institutions in Texas after the state eliminated affirmative action is likely due to the growing pool of minority applicants over time, rather than to race-neutral policies (Harris & Tienda, 2012; Kain, O’Brien, & Jargowsky, 2005).

- **Multidisciplinary empirical research finds no positive effect from race-neutral admissions policies on the enrollment of underrepresented students at select public institutions without targeted scholarship interventions**: Analysis of data specific to the TTTP does not find that the policy had any positive effect on minority student enrollment at flagship institutions, unless there was targeted scholarship intervention initiated by those institutions (Domina, 2007; Horn & Flores, in press).

- **An outreach strategy combining the geographic mechanisms that capitalize on state segregation patterns is not sufficient to overcome the factors of concentrated disadvantage that negatively influence college enrollment**: Capitalizing on residential and school segregation in the way the percent plan does to recruit high-achieving minority students to selective public institutions is not a sufficient recruitment mechanism. In fact, the concentrated disadvantage some students experience explains more precisely the lower likelihood that even high-achieving minority students will enroll in college (Tienda & Niu, 2006). Moreover, dissemination of information about the percent plan does not reach disadvantaged students at same rate it reaches the advantaged, despite the students’ similar achievement levels. In other words, high-achieving Black and Hispanic students know less about the TTTP than White students with a similar level of academic achievement (Niu, Sullivan, & Tienda, 2008).

- **Large-scale analyses of race-neutral admissions policies show that they may negatively affect the quality of all student enrollees, regardless of race, which suggests that the use of race-conscious methods is more efficient**
than not considering race: National and multi-state simulations of the implementation of a race-neutral admissions policy find that such a practice is ultimately inefficient and not any fairer than affirmative action policies, as the outcome is likely to lead to the admission of less qualified students from both minority and majority populations. For every arbitrary admissions rule, therefore, there is an affirmative action rule that has the capacity to achieve the desired level of diversity in the student body while also maintaining high academic standards (Chan & Eyster, 2003). Similar results have been documented by econometric studies that examined the effects of color-blind admissions on underrepresented student enrollment at selective institutions (Arcidiacono, 2005; Fryer, Loury, & Yuret, 2008; Howell, 2010).

V. Even under Optimal Conditions, the TTTP Has Yielded Limited Results in Terms of Underrepresented Minority Enrollment at Selective Public Institutions

- Race-neutral admissions policies do not effectively increase racial and ethnic diversity, even under optimal admissions and state policy conditions: Despite the optimal conditions for increasing the percentage of qualified underrepresented minority students in the state’s most selective public institutions through the race-neutral TTTP, the plan has failed to restore the level of ethnic and racial diversity present in the early 1990s, when minority groups had not yet experienced the demographic growth present today. Such “optimal” conditions include no official state ban on the use of race in college admissions, a highly segregated high school graduate population from which to draw concentrated percentages of all racial and ethnic groups, an admissions system that allows admission to any college or university in the state upon achieving the required high school rank, and targeted scholarships provided according to high school location from one of the selective flagship institutions.

- College participation is relative to a group’s presence in the K-16 school system: Statewide efforts to increase enrollment at any postsecondary institution have shown some gains, but college attendance goals for growing demographic groups such as Hispanics remain unfulfilled.

- Where one goes to college has long-term social and economic consequences: Enrollment in the elite sector of Texas public higher education remains a particularly elusive goal for African Americans, who have experienced an increase in general postsecondary enrollment trends but considerably less so in selective public institutions. Research indicates that college quality plays a role in earnings and job choices after completing a bachelor’s degree. The benefits of attending selective colleges and universities are particularly large for low-income and some minority groups, and they remain in effect for decades (Dale & Krueger, 2002; Hoekstra, 2009; Hoxby, 2009; Long, 2010).

References


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1 *U.S. News & World Report* ranked The University of Texas at Austin 13th and Texas A&M University 19th among national public universities, as per the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2012).

2 The TTTP was created in direct response to the 1996 5th Circuit Court of Appeals decision in *Hopwood v. Texas*, which ended the ability of institutions included in the jurisdiction to consider race as part of their college admissions processes. In 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court *Grutter v. Bollinger* case affirmed as constitutional the consideration of race as part of a holistic admissions process. The University of Texas at Austin, one of two elite institutions in the state, reinstated the consideration of race in their admissions process in 2005, while Texas A&M University declined to revise its admissions processes to include consideration of race. California and Florida implemented their own versions of a percent admissions plan, although as a replacement for race-conscious admissions and with requirements that initially included additional academic requirements, different percentage of automatic admitted students and limited choice of institution in which a qualified student could enroll.